

Learning and Transfer

The chapter begins with a definition of learning transfer that I would like to reiterate, “the ability to extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts.” Another quote from the chapter that stuck with me, and I’m paraphrasing, is “it is better to broadly educate than to train for a particular task.” I agree with this statement and I think it applies to the courses I teach. In a programming class I am teaching specific syntax but also demonstrating how to use that syntax to solve different coding problems. In my Introduction to Data Communications course, I teach material conceptually and show students how understanding basic concepts or properties of a particular technology will allow them to be able to understand how to utilize or implement newer versions of the technology as it is released. I find it is helpful to explain to students how IT tasks were once performed and compare the old methods with the new to help them understand what benefits the newer methods have brought to the process. Which is something else reinforced in the chapter - the difference between understanding and just memorizing facts.

“Expertise occurs with only major investments of time.” I felt that the chapter reinforced my stance on practicing the knowledge that you are learning. I tell my students that learning to be good at writing HTML is no different than practicing to be a better baseball pitcher, or tennis player, or golfer. The greats put in hours practicing their craft; they live it, breathe it, and eat it. Motivating students to embody that philosophy, another feature of transfer covered in the chapter, is one of the most difficult things I do as a teacher. So many students think that spending three hours a week with me in the classroom, following along and mimicking the code I am typing, is enough to become a professional Web designer. I try to impress upon them that I’ve been doing it for twenty years and I am still learning new pieces of the puzzle every day. The first day of class I tell them that I can teach them basic HTML in just a few hours but it takes a lifetime to master.

Context is another feature I try to bring to my courses. I try to convey through lecture and emulate through assignments real world scenarios that help students put into context the concepts that they are learning. In my HTML course I have students upload their assignments to a real Web server using FTP, just like they would do in the real world. One of the reasons I use the textbook I do in the HTML class is because it frames the subject in each chapter using real world assignments that represent the same types of problem solving issues that students might run into when dealing with clients in the real world. In my Intro to the Internet course, I have students register a domain name, and then use it to develop Internet-based marketing campaigns that might be used by them when promoting a business of their own or for an employer. I’d have to say that I agree with John Dewey and have been unwittingly implementing his vision of education for years. “School should be less about preparation for life and more about life itself.”